

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03
NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06
IO-13 /069 W
-----281247Z 086152 /47

R 271452Z MAY 77
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3274
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
USINT BAGHDAD
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
SECDEF
DIA WASHDC
USCINCEUR

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 3365

E.O. 11652: XGDS-4
TAGS: PFOR, SY, IZ
SUBJECT: A LOCAL VIEW OF IRAQI REGIME'S DIFFICULTIES AND SYRO-IRAQI
DISPUTE

1. MFA AMERICAN AFFAIRS DIRECTOR SHOULFI, WHO MAINTAINS
INFREQUENT CONTACTS WITH IRAQIS AND WHO STATES HE HAS DEBATED
WITH MANY IRAQI BAATHISTS WHO ARE NOW IN RESPONSIBLE PARTY
POSITIONS IN BAGHDAD, RECENTLY GAVE US HIS VIEWS ON BAGHDAD
REGIME'S INTERNAL DIFFICULTIES AND EFFECT ON SYRO-IRAQI
DISPUTE. HE BEGAN BY NOTING THAT DISTURBANCES IN KERBALA WERE
MORE SERIOUS THAN HE HAD SEEN THEM DEPICTED IN PUBLIC. TIED
TO RELIGIOUS UNREST WERE SIGNS OF DISLOYALTY TO REGIME FROM
WITHIN POPULAR MILITA, THE MILITARY ORGANIZATION WHICH
SHOULFI CLAIMED USED TO BE CONSIDERED MORE LOYAL THAN IRAQI MILITARY
AND WAS USED IN PART AS COUNTERWEIGHT TO MILITARY.

2. SHOULFI CONTINUED THAT MILITIA IS A CREATION OF THE
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BAATH PARTY, AND THUS ATTITUDES IN MILITIA REFLECT TO
SOME EXTENT TRENDS WITHIN PARTY. PARTY ALSO HAD SOME
CLAIM IN IRAQ AS INSTITUTION REPRESENTATIVE OF THE IRAQI
PEOPLE, OR AT LAST MORE REPRESENTATIVE THAN SYRIAN BAATH
WAS IN SYRIA.

3. RELATING THIS TO SYRO-IRAQI DISPUTE, SHOULFI SAID IRAQI

BAATHISTS ARE MILITANTLY OPPOSED TO SYRIAN REGIME AND SYRIAN BAATH PARTY. IT IS GENERAL CONSENSUS OF IRAQI BAATHISTS THAT SYRIAN BAATH NO LONGER UPHOLDS TRUE BAATHIST PRINCIPLES. IRAQI BAATHISTS ARE STRONGLY COMMITTED TO TOPPLING ASSAD REGIME AND TO REFORMING THEIR SYRIAN PARTY APOSTATES, BUT THEY SUSPECT SADDAM HUSSEIN DOES NOT SHARE THEIR COMMITMENT AND APPRAISE HIS ANTI-SYRIAN CAMPAIGN AS THEATER FOR THEIR BENEFIT. SHOEFI CLAIMS THAT IN CURRENT CIRCUMSTANCES OF UNREST IN IRAQ, HE SEES LITTLE HOPE FOR IMPROVEMENT IN SYRO-IRAQI TIES BECAUSE SADDAM HUSSEIN CANNOT AFFORD TO FURTHER ANTAGONIZE HIS BAATHIST SUPPORTS. SHOEFI CONCLUDED THAT THE SYRIANS CONTACTED OVER PAST MONTHS AS PART OF BAGHDAD'S EFFORT TO FORGE ANTI-ASSAD FRONT HAD ALMOST UNANIMOUSLY REBUFFED IRAQI OVERTURES BECAUSE IT WAS BELIEVED LOCALLY THAT, IN THE FINAL ANALYSIS, BAGHDAD REGIME WOULD RENEGE ON ITS COMMITMENT TO TOPPLE ASSAD.

4. COMMENT: SHOEFI'S REMARKS REFLECT VIEWS OF AN INDIVIDUAL WHO IS HIMSELF VETERAN OF BAATH PARTY CONFLICTS WITHIN SYRIA AND BETWEEN SYRIAN AND IRAQI WINGS OF PARTY. IF SHOEFI'S ANALYSIS IS CORRECT, TWO REGIMES WILL FIND PLENTY OF DIFFICULTY IN PAPERING OVER THEIR DIFFERENCES; INSTEAD, SADDAM WILL PROBABLY HAVE TO PRODUCE SOME TANGIBLE EVIDENCE OF COMPROMISE ON ASSAD'S PART. AS WE LAST NOTED IN DAMASCUS 3298, WE HAVE NO EVIDENCE THAT RECONCILIATION TALKS HAVE MADE ANY PROGRESS. MURPHY

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: POLITICAL STABILITY, PARTY UNITY, GOVERNMENT OVERTHROW
Control Number: n/a
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Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977DAMASC03365
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: X4
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770191-0913
Format: TEL
From: DAMASCUS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
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Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19770511/aaaaaiyq.tel
Line Count: 89
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
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Message ID: 589d6088-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 03-Feb-2005 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2342381
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: A LOCAL VIEW OF IRAQI REGIME\`S DIFFICULTIES AND SYRO-IRAQI DISPUTE
TAGS: PFOR, PGOV, PINS, SY, IZ
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/589d6088-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009